

# Film on Tsar Nicholas' Mistress Facing Backlash in Russia's Regions

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Karo-Premier Studio

Two regions in southern Russia are trying to ban the local release of a film about the love affair of Russia's last Tsar with a ballerina, saying it is offensive to believers and a "desecration of the sacred."

The film, *Mathilde*, has been targeted by faith groups and officials who believe its portrayal of Tsar Nicholas II, an Orthodox saint, is insulting.

Among its flashpoints is a moment when ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska's dress slips during a performance to reveal a naked breast, and a young Nicholas in the audience drops his opera glasses in surprise.

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Protesters have [said](#) that "cinemas would burn, maybe people will even suffer" if the film is

shown.

Now, authorities in Chechnya and Dagestan have sent letters to the Russian Culture Ministry asking to ban the film's distribution within their territories, the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper reported this week.

The letters said that "thousands of people of different confessions are asking for the film not to be released because they consider it intentional mockery of the feelings of believers, offensive to their religious feelings and an attack on their human dignity, as well as a defilement of the sacred and of the centuries-long history of the peoples of Russia."

The Culture Ministry has said it is considering the requests, which on Wednesday received the backing of a senior Muslim cleric.

Albir Krganov, the mufti of Moscow, said more moral filmmakers should make an alternative movie about Nicholas II that would be "even more beautiful, so the world could see it and gasp," [according](#) to the state-run Interfax news agency.

Indeed, filming began on Tuesday of a documentary to be called "the lie of Mathilde" outside a church in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg built on the spot where the tsar and his family were murdered by Bolsheviks in 1918, the Znak.com news site reported.

It may however not be the grand spectacle the mufti was looking for — the [first footage](#) was of an academic talking to camera.

Meanwhile, cinemas in the Crimean city of Sevastopol stopped showing the trailer for Mathilde, which is due for release on Oct. 26, after local prosecutors issued a warning, the state-run TASS news agency [reported](#).

TASS said the prosecutors acted after receiving a warning from Natalia Poklonskaya, a deputy in Russia's Duma parliament who has advocated for the film to be outlawed, saying it breaks a law on offending religious believers.

Poklonskaya has called the entire affair between the ballerina and the tsar fabricated, despite historical evidence.

The film's director, Alexei Uchitel, has said authorities have checked the film and found no violation of the law.

On Wednesday he said: "I propose that [Chechen leader] Mr. Kadyrov and other doubters not write letters. I invite them to watch the film, and then let's talk."

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